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ABSTRACT

Formative teacher evaluation promotes teacher growth by illuminating some areas of difficulty and creating a viable course for change. The goal is to help teachers become more effective. Since 1991, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE) has supported selected school systems in their attempts to design and implement formative teacher-evaluation plans. This paper describes the implementation of formative teacher-evaluation plans in three school district--Lee County Schools (North Carolina), Richland School District Two (South Carolina), and Surry County Schools (North Carolina). Administrator and teacher teams from each district participated in SERVE-sponsored workshops between 1991 and 1993, and then helped to implement formative teacher-evaluation programs in their schools. All three cases were characterized by strong teacher and administrator support. However, they encountered the following difficulties--time constraints, lack of equipment, teacher procrastination, and initial unwillingness to participate. Teachers report that the new system is less stressful and has enhanced teacher professionalism and feelings of empowerment. (LMI)

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TEACHER EVALUATION PLANS THAT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

OVERVIEW

Most teachers in the United States are evaluated by an administrator or an evaluator on a summative system. Summative evaluation is a process that allows supervisors to check for teacher competency (Barber, 1985). The other type of evaluation system is formative, a process that promotes teacher growth by illuminating some area of difficulty and creating a viable course for change (Barber, 1985). Its intent is to help teachers become more effective. Although summative evaluation is the prevalent form of teacher evaluation, formative evaluation -- particularly for experienced teachers -- is growing in popularity.

Since 1991, the SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE), the federally-funded educational laboratory serving the Southeast, has supported selected school systems in the region in their attempts to design and implement formative teacher evaluation plans. Teachers and administrators in these particular systems had grown frustrated with their summative evaluation plans; the evaluations were time-consuming and had little payback for participants. In addition, the summative plans were not meeting the professional needs of experienced teachers.

Administrator and teacher teams from Lee County Schools (NC), Richland School District Two (SC), and Surry County Schools (NC) participated in SERVE-sponsored formative teacher

evaluation workshops between 1991 and 1993. The emphasis of the workshops was on the differences between summative and formative teacher evaluation, formative teacher evaluation rationale and benefits, formative methods and sources of feedback, and samples of formative plans. In small groups, participants practiced formative methods. At the workshops, participants became familiar with key terms associated with formative evaluation. They included teacher self-evaluation, where teachers make judgments about their own teaching (Barber, 1987); peer review, a process by which a review is carried out by a person or person of a teacher's own rank (Barber, 1987); teacher portfolio, a purposeful collection of work that gives information about a teacher's efforts, progress or achievement (Northwest Evaluation Association, 1990); and professional growth, the improvement of a teacher's performance or skills (Barber, 1985).

Teams returned to their school communities and designed and implemented formative plans that met the needs of educators in their systems. Paramount was the notion that formative evaluation was a professional improvement process for teachers that emphasized collegiality and goal-setting.

FORMATIVE PLANS

The formative plan developed by teachers and administrators at Deep River Elementary School (Lee County Schools, NC) was initiated in January 1994. Teachers remained

on the state summative teacher evaluation plan and, in addition, volunteered to try the formative pilot during spring 1994. The pilot plan included 11 formative method options divided into three categories:

Self-Evaluation - videotape or audiotape of a classroom lesson, self-rating using a specified rating form, teacher journal, self-study materials, observation and modeling of another teacher, teacher portfolios

Peer Review - in-class observation by a peer including a pre and post conference, videotape observation by a peer including a pre and post conference, teacher journal reviews by a peer

Student or Parent Feedback - interviews with students or parents, surveys of students or parents (Lewis & Barber, 1986; Millman & Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Teachers were asked to select two options from two out of the three categories. Most of the teachers who participated chose a self-evaluation option and parent surveys as their formative evaluation methods.

A team of teachers and administrators from Richland School District Two (SC) developed a formative teacher evaluation plan for experienced high school teachers (six or more years of experience) in their district during fall 1991. Experienced teachers had the option of remaining on the summative plan or trying the formative plan. The evaluation plan consisted of teacher participants establishing goals for the evaluation (for example -- questioning techniques, use of

hands-on materials in the classroom), selecting a peer to view a videotape of their lessons or observe their classes, holding a pre conference with peer reviewer to determine what would be observed and how, completing the videotape or classroom observation, and teachers preparing for and holding the post conference to discuss the classroom observation. Experienced teachers in Richland Two are required to be evaluated every third year; teachers participating in the formative plan are on the same cycle. During the 1993-94 school year, a teacher portfolio option was added and some experienced teachers from all 13 schools in the district participated in the formative plan.

A teacher and administrator team from Franklin Elementary School (Surry County Schools, NC) developed a formative plan in fall 1991. Tenured teachers could choose to participate in the new plan or remain on the summative plan. The formative plan is on a two-year cycle. On the "on" year teachers participated in three formative evaluations -- a videotape of a classroom lesson that is reviewed by a peer, a classroom observation by a peer, and a self and teaching unit evaluation. On the "off" year the teacher videotaped a classroom lesson for a peer to review. For the 1994-95 school year teachers from three other schools in the system will have the option of participating in the formative plan. A teacher portfolio component will be added and teachers will have the opportunity to develop a thematic unit using a portfolio

format that follows the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and integrates communication skills with as many subject areas as possible.

FORMATIVE PLAN SIMILARITIES

When the teacher and administrator teams at the three sites developed their respective plans, they had some restrictions and guidelines. New teachers in North and South Carolina were required to be evaluated on existing state summative plans. Experienced teachers in both states could be assessed on an evaluation plan chosen by officials from their respective school systems; this is how the idea of using formative evaluation in this way originated.

That school representatives developed their own formative evaluation plans was a critical part of the process. In all three cases, experienced teachers -- after obtaining approval from their principals -- voluntarily decided to participate in the new plan. Interestingly enough, an administrator at each site originally pushed for a formative evaluation plan for teachers because he or she believed that the summative plans were inappropriate for experienced teachers who had already proven themselves competent. Likewise, building administrators were the first ones to lend their moral and organizational support to the plans (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). At all three sites, teacher support for the formative plan was strong and almost all the teachers who were eligible

to participate, did. The plan was started at one or two schools at each site and eventually expanded to others (Achilles & Young, 1983). Participating teachers felt that they were in control of the evaluation process (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977) and demonstrated a willingness to try new things in the classroom. Commented one teacher, "I feel more professional and in-charge of my own evaluation. I can focus critically on my own teaching and choose what I want to work on." The peer components contained in the three plans promoted collegiality among teachers and strengthened morale. The formative evaluation development teams monitored and evaluated the plans at each site on a regular basis (Achilles & Young, 1983). Many of these characteristics reflected the literature on successful school change.

FORMATIVE PLAN DIFFICULTIES

Problems associated with the formative plans were similar at the three sites. Teachers at Deep River Elementary (NC) were initially reluctant to participate because they believed that the formative plan was too good to be true. After reassurance from their principal, every tenured teacher in the school but one participated in the pilot. Like teachers at other sites, Deep River teachers discovered it was difficult to find the time to complete the evaluation process. There weren't enough video cameras at Deep River to tape classroom lessons, so the principal found the funds to purchase another

one.

During the first year of the plan, many Richland Two (SC) teachers procrastinated until the last minute to complete their evaluation requirements. One administrator commented, "We (administrators) will not carry the sticks for this project. It is not our role to remind teachers to complete this plan." Teacher leaders of the project strongly encouraged participating teachers to complete activities associated with the project and to get the paperwork in. Related to this, central office personnel initially failed to recognize the new teacher evaluation paperwork and the completed forms were misplaced. Once the staff was alerted about the new forms, the problem was solved.

Some teachers at Franklin Elementary (NC) expressed concerns about their new formative plan. They were reluctant to participate in the formative pilot because they believed that the school board would not approve a permanent plan. They eventually came on board when they realized that the plan had community support. Like the other sites, there was a lack of video cameras; funds were found to purchase another camera. Once again, teacher procrastination was an issue; some teachers waited until the last minute to complete project requirements.

At Deep River Elementary and Franklin Elementary there was initial unwillingness on the part of some teachers to participate in the new plan. This supports the literature

related to innovation -- some teachers are reluctant to try something new (Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Lack of equipment, insufficient time to complete the plan, and teacher procrastination were common themes at the sites. Teacher procrastination became less of an issue as teachers from Richland Two (SC) and Franklin Elementary (NC) became more familiar with the program in years two and three. Lack of time to complete the formative evaluation requirements continues to be a problem. Teacher leaders at the sites have encouraged participants to select a peer reviewer who has the same planning time and to use the videotaping of a classroom lesson as an efficient way to review lessons. Educators at all three sites overcame obstacles and were able to implement successful formative plans.

TEACHER COMMENTS AND OUTCOMES

Participating teachers at Deep River Elementary, the two Richland Two high schools, and Franklin Elementary have been enthusiastic about their formative evaluation plans. Their comments support the ideas of teacher empowerment, teacher collegiality, and improved instruction. Teachers said:

- We are less intimidated, thus more natural. We can improve from input and view the instrument as constructive criticism.
- We don't have to be afraid to seek help.

- We are working together to make this project a success.
- We are a more unified faculty. There is greater morale among staff members.
- It (videotaping and peer review) has given me a visual picture of my performance in the classroom and an opportunity to view a fellow teacher and get some ideas that can be applied to my methods.
- My peer reviewer answered my questions in detail. Our discussion of the pros and cons of my lesson were fruitful. We like formative evaluation; it shows trust in our ability to seek self-improvement.
- As a result the new formative plan, we have an increased sense of professionalism, new relationships with colleagues, a more reflective view of teaching, new leadership roles, and improved classroom instruction.

Teacher participants from the three systems reported that the new formative plans required more of teachers than previous evaluation plans. They said that the process was more helpful than the old process in improving classroom instruction. Teachers said the new plans were less stressful for teachers and allowed them to be honest about their professional development needs. Finally, educators felt sense of empowerment and professionalism because the responsibility of the evaluation process was on them, and not on the administrators.

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